Introduction

Nietzsche is widely recognised as one of the most influential philosophers of all time. He is also one of the most fascinating. One does not merely read Nietzsche, as Thomas Mann astutely observed, one experiences him (Mann 1959: 141). *The Gay Science*, first published in 1882, is one of his greatest experience books. It is so partly because in *GS* Nietzsche recounts what he elsewhere describes in a letter from this period as his "inner disturbances, revolutions, solitudes" (Middleton 1996: 187). By 'experiences', he stresses, he does not mean "crude 'events' impinging from without" (*D* 481); rather he signifies radical upheavals and transformations within his own life. *GS* is a deeply personal book, yet also an important work of philosophy. Indeed, Nietzsche claims that philosophy is only significant if it traverses the personal. In the 1887 Preface he doubts whether someone "who has not experienced something similar could, by means of prefaces, be brought closer to the *experiences* of this book" (*GS* P 1). If we are to understand this book we must not simply comprehend a theoretical perspective; we must also move nearer to certain kinds of experiences.

We can therefore mark out *GS* as a philosophical autobiography, a record of his own experiences. Nietzsche identifies these as experiences of self-transformation. *GS* expresses what he identifies in *Daybreak* (1881) as "the vicissitudes and convulsions that befall the most solitary and quietest life which possesses leisure and burns with the passion of thinking" (*D* 481). Great philosophers, he argues, require such experiences and their readers cannot comprehend their philosophies without themselves undergoing similar transformative experiences (*D* 481). Clearly, Nietzsche's book is a profoundly unconventional text by the

standards of his German contemporaries and today's academic philosophers.

To understand *GS* therefore we first address a fundamental question: 'How does *Nietzsche* understand the discipline of philosophy?' We shall answer this question in the Introduction before turning to a detailed exegesis of *GS*' five books and a preface. In broad-brush strokes, I argue that Nietzsche follows the ancients in conceiving philosophy as a way of life that entails a set of philosophical practices, disciplines and techniques that enable philosophers to transform and cure themselves. The significance of *GS*, I claim, lies in its radical transfiguration of the ancient model of philosophy as a way of life and the insights into modern culture that Nietzsche believes he derives from applying this model. Nietzsche's 'meta-philosophical' view that philosophy is a way of life, a matter of wise *living*, not just theory construction, is controversial and unfashionable. Yet, as we shall see, only this account of his meta-philosophical view allows us to comprehend *GS*' meaning and significance.

Let us consider these claims in more detail. For all of his popularity among avant-garde painters, writers, musicians and left and right wing political leaders and activists,[1] to name just a few of his avid readers, in academic philosophy circles Nietzsche has been and remains an 'untimely' philosopher. Until fairly recently Nietzsche was rarely taught in mainstream academic philosophy. We have witnessed several waves in the rehabilitation of Nietzsche as a respectable philosopher. Partly due to the fact that his sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche succeeded in making Nietzsche popular with the Nazi leadership he was often considered the 'godfather' of fascism in Germany and Western Europe. As early as 1937 there was a backlash against her conscription of Nietzsche to the Nazi cause in the form of the aptly titled 1937 special issue of the French surrealist journal *Acéphale, Réparation à Nietzsche.* Scholars have not stopped making reparations to Nietzsche ever since. In the opening essay of this journal, Georges Bataille claimed that "fascism and Nietzscheanism are mutually exclusive . . . on one side life is tied down and stabilised in an endless servitude, one the other there is not

[1] Steven Ascheim (1992) records the extraordinary impact of Nietzsche's work on the German artistic avant-garde and political actors.

only a circulation of free air, but the wind of tempest; one on side the charm of human culture is broken in order to make room for vulgar force, on the other force and violence are tragically dedicated to its charm" (Bataille 1985: 185–186). In the post-war period Albert Camus, also suggested that "we shall never finish making reparation for the injustice done to [Nietzsche]" by fascists' uses and abuses of his philosophy, yet he also acknowledged that rebellion "placed in the crucible of Nietzschean philosophy . . . ends in biological or historical Caesarism" (Camus 1981: 67, 71). Most famously in the English-speaking world, Walter Kaufmann attempted to save Nietzsche from Elizabeth's malign intervention by describing the theme of "the anti-political individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world" as "the leitmotif of Nietzsche's life and thought" (Kaufmann 1974a: 418).

More recently there has been a polarisation of Nietzsche interpretation. On the one side, in the 1970s and 1980s French and Italian philosophers sought to advance beyond Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy as a defence of a metaphysical doctrine of the will to power. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche's metaphysical doctrine brought to completion the demand for the total technological organisation of the world that he (Heidegger) claimed was implicit in Western metaphysics.[2] Against the Heideggerian interpretation, these philosophers identified a 'new Nietzsche' whose philosophical style aimed to overthrow the metaphysical demand for the truth about being in the name of transforming philosophy into a playful, open-ended, undecidable form of rhetoric or 'nomadic' thought (see Derrida 1979; Deleuze 1983; Allison 1985; Vattimo 2006). On the other side, philosophers trained in the so-called analytic tradition reacted against the 'new' Nietzsche and sought to reclaim his philosophy as an intellectually credible 'naturalism' of one stripe or another (Clark 1990; Janaway 2007: 34–53; Leiter 2007; Janaway and Robertson 2012). For the most part, however, Nietzsche remains an outlier or oddity for academic philosophers. "In the twentieth century", as Werner Stegmaier explains, "Nietzsche

[2] For Heidegger's clearest elaboration of his interpretation of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician and the connections he draws between the history of Western metaphysics and technological domination see Heidegger (1977: 53–114 and 115–154).

became famous but remained infamous. No matter how popular his catchwords became, his thinking never acquired the status of a common philosophical ground like that of Aristotle, Descartes or Kant. Most of our academic colleagues outside of Nietzsche research still hesitate to accept his ideas, not to mention adopting them" (Stegmaier 2016: 384).

Yet at the same time, we cannot seriously doubt that Nietzsche's work, including *GS*, is in some sense philosophically important. In Bernard William's words, "*The Gay Science* is a remarkable book, both in itself and as offering a way into some of Nietzsche's most important ideas" (Williams 2001: vii). Written in a series of scintillating, beautifully wrought aphorisms, it contains some of his most famous and important themes and images: the death of God, the ideal of self-fashioning, with the closely connected, enigmatic doctrines of '*amor fati*' and the eternal recurrence and the vexing, unresolved problem of the value of truth. Why should we pursue truth and not untruth? Is the search for truth compatible with living a flourishing life? Does an unconditional will to truth undermine life? In *GS* Nietzsche also elaborates one of the most compelling and influential accounts of the modern crisis of values that he later called nihilism. His goal in *GS* is to measure the depth of this crisis and show the so-called free spirits among his readers how it might be overcome through a new art of living.

However, if, as Williams rightly maintains, *GS* is an important philosophical text, we must concede that it is so in a highly unusual way. As any reader of Nietzsche will attest, his style of philosophy does not fit neatly into the folds of academic convention. Among the central reasons for scholarly perplexity or hostility towards Nietzsche's philosophy is the fact that he seems to abhor systematic theory and style. Indeed, as Williams famously remarked, his texts seem "booby-trapped" against the extraction of philosophical theories (Williams 2006: 300).

This is especially true of the so-called free-spirit trilogy: *Human, All Too Human*, vol. 1 (1878), *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879), *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880), which were subsequently published together as *Human, All Too Human*, vol.2, *Daybreak* (1881) and *The Gay Science* (1882/1887). In these texts Nietzsche eschews conventional German philosophical styles and self-consciously adopts the

'aphoristic' style of the French moralists from Montaigne to La Rochefoucauld. In fact, he forges a style that recalls Greek and Roman philosophy's blend of philosophy and poetry, Montaigne's classically informed essays and La Rochefoucauld's art of the maxim. The free-spirit books are composed of continuously numbered sections with italicised titles[3] of varying length and styles, from one-sentence maxims to sustained meditations. Nietzsche organises these numbered sections into separate books, with titles announcing their themes in the case of *HH* 1, untitled in the case of *HH* 2 and *D*, and three untitled and two titled in the case of *GS*, which is also bookended with 'Jokes, Cunning and Revenge: Prelude in German Rhymes' and an 'Appendix: Songs of Prince Vogelfrei'.[4] The sections within each book are mostly arranged paratactically, that is to say, they are simply placed side by side without any indication of how (or if) they are related to or co-ordinated with one another. If there seems to be

[3] In *HH* Nietzsche occasionally published sections without italicised titles – e.g. *HH* I, 133–135, *HH* I, 136–144 and *HH* I, 630–637. These sections stand as an exception that proves the rule. Nietzsche mostly arranged the sections of the trilogy 'paratactically', or at least without any discernible co-ordination among the continuously numbered sections apart from assigning groups into separate books. In the case of *HH* 132–135 and *HH* 629–337, however, Nietzsche deliberately organised and marked these sections into a continuous run of argument. *HH* 132, for example, announces a theme in its title, '*On the Christian Need for Redemption*' and the following four untitled sections unmistakably develop a sustained argument that this need is based on a false psychology. Indeed, by beginning 135 with the word 'thus' Nietzsche explicitly indicates that it is the logical terminus of the argument he had developed across 132–134. The same principle of organisation applies to *HH* 1, 136–144 and *HH* 1, 630–637. In *D* and *GS*, however, there are no exceptions to Nietzsche paratactic arrangement of titled, continuously numbered sections grouped into separate books.

[4] Kathleen Higgins develops the most detailed treatment of Nietzsche's prelude of rhyming verse, arguing, among other things, that they are call for the rebirth of the chivalrous spirit of the troubadours as a model of living and their practice of courtly love or fin' amor; or more generally, that they express his goal of replacing "the moral perspective on life's significance with an aesthetic sensibility toward everyday matters". They also, she suggests, express his playful, childlike opposition to traditional morality akin to Goethe's singspiel after which Nietzsche named these verses (see Higgins 2000: 14–41; 16, 18, 21). On Nietzsche's poetry more generally see (Grundlehner 1986). James Luchte, the editor of the most recent English language translation of Nietzsche's poetry makes a strong claim for their philosophical significance: "Nietzsche's poetic expression is no mere supplement, nor an attempt to appeal to the baroque aspects of thought, which exceed logical, mathematical and scientific expression . . . It is through poetry – and music – that he not only descends into the depths of existence so as to gain a glimpse of truth in her own domain, but also to open up – and hold open – a creative space for his own convalescence as one who has tirelessly attempted to overcome the nihilism of the Platonic-Christian epoch" (Luchte 2010: 38–39). Robin Small expresses a conventional lament about Nietzsche's decision to conclude GS' final edition with songs, dismissing the final poem, for example, as a "blustery farrago" (Small 2017).

a logical chain of argument that connects some sections together Nietzsche leaves it unmarked and ambiguous. Nietzsche's 'paratactic' style frustrates and challenges readers seeking to identify a systematic philosophical perspective.

The many attempts to reconstruct Nietzsche's theoretical system not only face the challenge of his paratactic style, they must also confront the fact that within the numbered sections themselves he rarely develops anything corresponding to a systematic logical argument defending or rejecting a philosophical proposition. Nietzsche supplies very few syllogisms. Indeed, Nietzsche's numbered sections contain a bewildering array of different literary and philosophical genres, including maxims, confessions, parables, consolations, anecdotes, exhortations, notes of advice and dialogues (between anonymous As and Bs or the wanderer and his shadow). In arguably his most famous section 'The Madman' (125), for example, he does not offer a standard philosophical defence of atheism, but an extraordinary, hyperbolic dramatisation of the death of God. Nietzsche dramatises this event through a recycled version of an ancient Cynic *chreia* (or anecdote), which Diogenes Laertius reports in the *Lives of Famous Philosophers*, the text Nietzsche researched intensively as a young, aspiring classicist. Nietzsche reworks the *chreia* of Diogenes the Cynic who is reported to have "lit a lamp in broad daylight and said, as he went about, 'I am searching for a human being'" (*DL* 6.41; Desmond 2006: 233).

From the perspective of the then dominant tradition of academic philosophy, Nietzsche's free-spirit books are simply unrecognisable *as* philosophy. Anecdotes as a medium of philosophical insight and communication did not figure in works of nineteenth-century German philosophy. Nor do they appear in contemporary academic philosophy. It is a measure of Nietzsche's departure from philosophical convention that, in sharp contrast to Kantian and Hegelian scholarship, it still remains a live question in Nietzsche scholarship whether he intended to present any 'theory' at all (metaphysical, epistemological or ethical) or regardless of his intentions his books contain any such 'theory'.[5] As Richard Schacht writes of *HH*: "Even

[5] Nietzsche scholars find it difficult to agree upon his philosophical goal. For example, commentators are divided over whether he intended his account of the 'will to power' in

if [it] had been published by a professional philosopher . . . it very probably would not have been regarded as a contribution to the philosophical literature by academic philosophers either in Nietzsche's own time or subsequently. Nor is it clear that it should be; for there is much in it that does not seem to have much to do with philosophical matters. Even the ideas on philosophical topics it addresses are seldom presented in recognizably philosophical ways" (Schacht 1986: xi). The same is true of *GS*. In the 1887 Preface Nietzsche does not describe it as advancing a metaphysical or scientific theory, but as a memoir of his own experiences of illness, convalescence and recovery that sheds light on the psychology of philosophy, or more particularly on "the relation between health and philosophy" (*GS* P 1).

How then are we to conceive Nietzsche's strange book of "*experiences*" (*GS* P 1), which challenges conventional academic expectations of philosophy? Clearly, we must acknowledge that he is an unconventional or 'untimely' philosopher: he does not write in the style of his contemporaries, or, it seems, share their scholarly aim of writing systematic theoretical treatises. Is *GS*, as many assume, a "delightful but disunified book" (Sinhababu 2014) that makes the task of writing a coherent account of its philosophy quixotic? Is *GS* a philosophically irrelevant autobiography?

In addressing these questions, we should note firstly that Nietzsche himself conceived the free-spirit trilogy itself as unified project. On the back cover of its original 1882 edition, he wrote that *GS* represents "the conclusion of a series of writings . . . whose common goal is to erect *a new image and ideal of the free spirit*" (see Kaufmann 1974a: 28; Schaberg 1995: 86). Second, Nietzsche's untimely approach to philosophy was the flipside of his criticisms of professional philosophy. Indeed, he caustically dismissed what passed for 'philosophy' among his peers. In his judgement the work of German academic philosophers bore no connection to philosophy understood as 'love of wisdom'. Who among them, he exclaims, "would not be ashamed to call himself a 'wise man' or even merely 'one who is becoming

BGE 36 as a defence of a theoretical doctrine – e.g. a panpsychic metaphysics or cosmology of will to power – or as a *reductio ad absurdum* of all such doctrines (see Loeb 2015).

wise'!" (*PT* 47). Wisdom, in the ancient sense of living wisely, he lamented, is simply not on modern philosophers' agenda.

Nietzsche's judgement that modern philosophy is disconnected from or hostile to the ancient notion of philosophical wisdom bears further consideration. As Stephen Grimm observes, wisdom in this sense of knowing how to live well went "from being a central concern of ancient and medieval thinkers to a near afterthought" for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Grimm 2015: 140). Pierre Hadot contrasted the ancient model of philosophy as a way of life with the late modern assumption that all philosophers worthy of studying strive "to invent, each in an original way, a new construction, systematic and abstract, intended somehow or other to explain the universe, or at the least, if we are talking about contemporary philosophers, a new discourse about language" (Hadot 2002: 2). Yet "in [the ancient] view", he asserts, "philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory – much less in the exegesis of texts – but rather in the art of living" (Hadot 1995: 83). "The philosophical act", as Hadot observes, "is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of self and of being. It is a progress which causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better" (Hadot 1995: 83).

In this book I argue that *GS* is a distinctive part of a unified philosophical project: viz. Nietzsche's effort to revive the ancient model of philosophy as a way of life, and the closely connected idea of the philosopher as physician. Nietzsche's untimeliness derives from his transfiguration of the ancient model of philosophical wisdom. Nietzsche challenges modern philosophy and philosophers to reassess the meaning and purpose of their discipline by appealing to and drawing on this ancient model. For Nietzsche philosophy *is* an art of living and the point of philosophising is to contribute to the flourishing of life. Philosophy's primary purpose, he suggests, is not 'merely' theoretical or academic, but curative. In the ancient view, as Hadot explains, philosophy "is a *conversion* . . . which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it" (Hadot 1995: 83). The ancient schools argue that conventional beliefs and values are not only false, but also that they create distress and illness. For this reason, they also adopt the view that if individuals are to flourish philosophers must perform a medical or therapeutic role: they must cure illnesses. "In the view of all philosophical schools",

Hadot asserts "mankind's principal cause of suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness were the passions . . . Philosophy thus appears . . . as a therapeutics of the passions . . . Each school had its own therapeutic method, but all of them linked their therapeutics to a profound transformation of the individual's mode of seeing and being. The object of spiritual exercises is precisely to bring about this transformation" (Hadot 1995: 83).[6] The great Roman politician, lawyer, and orator Cicero succinctly expresses the medical analogy on which Hellenistic philosophies pivot:

> There is I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all of our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves. (Cicero 1927: 3.6)

Nietzsche's conception of philosophy accords with the essentials of the ancient model: it conceives philosophy as art of living whose exercises convert or transform one's being and do so therapeutically so that by means of philosophy one realises a joyful life. Like the ancient philosophical therapists Nietzsche also believes we flourish by living according to nature. In *GS* his overarching project is to "*naturalise* humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature" (*GS* 109). Nietzsche aims to rediscover and redeem nature for the sake of making humanity 'more' natural or more purely natural.

It is Nietzsche's debt to this ancient legacy that explains why, from the standpoint of professional academic philosophers, much of what and how he writes does not seem to belong to 'philosophy' as they conceive it. We might consider just one minor example of the many seemingly personal, non-philosophical diversions that pepper his books. *GS* 312 is located at the very heart of Book 4:

> *My dog*. I have named my pain and call it 'dog' – it's just as faithful, just as obtrusive and shameless, just as entertaining, just as clever as every other dog – I can scold it and take my bad moods out on it that way others do with their dogs, servants, and wives. (*GS* 312)

[6] I follow Hadot in conceiving Nietzsche as one of the few modern philosophers to revive the ancient idea of philosophy as a way of life. However, as we shall see, he radically challenges the ancient conception of the good life (see Ure 2009; Mitcheson 2017). Ultimately Nietzsche disagrees with Hadot's claim that "Epicureanism and Stoicism . . . could nourish the spiritual life of men and women of our times" (Hadot, 1995: 280).

If we frame *GS* in terms of Nietzsche's own attempt to revive ancient philosophy as a way of life and the philosopher as a physician we can avoid treating such sections as inexplicable aberrations or irrelevant asides. In this section Nietzsche writes in the first person: it is his own pain for which he prescribes a cure. He also writes as physician to his own soul: he does not articulate a theory, but identifies a simple practice designed to alleviate his suffering. Following Hadot, we might say that Nietzsche describes a spiritual exercise the aim of which is to transform his life by attenuating his suffering. Nietzsche's amusing description of this psychological analgesic, which operates by comically deflating the significance of his pain, also alludes to the Cynic philosopher Diogenes the Dog, who conceived human flourishing as a completely self-sufficient and painless life. Diogenes realised this godlike self-sufficiency by living according to nature, which, so he assumed, required eliminating all unnecessary, conventional desires for 'external goods': e.g. power, possessions, reputation, offices, honours, children, brothers, friends, clothes or houses. Diogenes exemplified his Cynic philosophy in his life: scandalously taking up residence in a barrel and famously mocking the glory of Alexander the Great. Like Diogenes, Nietzsche identifies a technique or exercise of enduring and domesticating his pain: Diogenes inured himself to pain through constant exposure, Nietzsche comically deflates its significance.[7] Nietzsche shows how he domesticates his own pain by training it to be obedient or doglike.

Framed this way, we can see that even such seemingly minor personal diversions key into Nietzsche's overarching project of experimenting with and reclaiming the ancient model of the philosophical physician. In Nietzsche's aphoristic texts what appears marginal is central to his project of rejuvenating ancient philosophical wisdom. "What ultimately marked Nietzsche's affinity with ancient Cynicism", as Charles Bambach observes, "is his rejection of philosophy as knowledge in favour of *philosophia* as a discipline of and for *life*. Taking up the Cynics' understanding of their craft as *therapeia*, Nietzsche defines philosophy as therapy, as 'a spiritual cure' for the maladies that beset European culture" (Bambach 2010: 442–443).

[7] Nietzsche commentators tend to pass over such sections in silence, but for one exception see Higgins (2000: 167–169).